

Aleksandra Wagner

THE MEDIA AS A SPACE OF DELIBERATION BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF MEDIA DISCOURSE ON SELECTED ENERGY TOPICS — CONCLUSION

The analyses presented in this volume provide the foundations for attempting to diagnose the mainstream media discourse as a space for public deliberation. We perceive this space normatively, from the angle of the characteristics discussed above, such as inclusiveness, diversity of points of view, dialogicality, strength of argument, looking for the points of contact and mapping the differences between groups of actors, as well as their forming of coalitions and oppositions. The objective of this is to identify social problems and guidelines for their resolution, which then become the object of public policies. Important here is transparent presentation of interests, with priority given to the public interest – in the sense both of the good of the majority and of a beneficial resolution of problems for disadvantaged groups. The space of deliberation referring to media discourse is thus treated as a normative ideal of a symbolic space in which the discourses of various epistemic communities are present, visible to themselves and referring to one another. Moreover, these communities have the chance to become visible also to those who are not actively involved in them – viewers, readers, audiences in general. But this is not all. The polyphonic and intertextual space of this co-existence of discourses by its nature creates conditions for collective deliberation on issues of importance to society. The confrontation of various points of view is supposed to produce a better solution (than interest groups' initial proposals), but not to give the advantage to a specific point of view (e.g. through

eristic processes) or make any one community dominant. At the same time, though, these normative criteria lead to critical analysis and evaluation of the communicative processes taking place in the media space.

Of course, the rift between the realm of ideal premises and the practice of how discourses function in the media is not meant to emphasise the pathologies of the latter, but to point to the need for and forms of action to reorganise this practice; to critically analyse not only the process of defining the goals and instruments for achieving it but also the norms that these processes will follow in the public sphere. The authors therefore do not treat media discourses as the only public discourses, but as those which are visible in the media space.

The many differences in the media discourses on the various topics are described in detail in the previous chapters. Yet certain similarities can also be seen. Energy issues are given prime importance in the media representations. Where the subject of energy occurs in the media, it is treated as an important subject, particularly for economic and political reasons. This claim to importance is expressed in the frequent publication of information on the front pages of newspapers, functioning as the main topic of a programme or statement (while energy issues are also covered in relation to other important subjects), and involving in the discussion people in high positions in state and business structures identified with power (decision makers). The leading actors in the discourse describe this subject as crucial to citizens, the economy and the country. The common good that is so significant in deliberation processes is defined here in terms of geopolitical interest (which large economic interests are to serve). Although the rivalry of global economies and struggle for the dynamic of economic growth demarcate the thinking on acquisition and use of energy, it is hard to speak of a global perspective, as all decisions are taken at a domestic level, where the primary interests are those of the state. The discourse is lacking a clearly outlined global perspective of perception of energy issues, for example their importance for the planet or inequalities on a global scale.

Despite the attributed and unquestionable "importance," these issues differ in terms of popularity. We can understand this in two ways. First, popularity refers to the frequency with which a given topic is covered in the media; this is decided by the dynamic of political and economic events. Plans, decisions, and meetings of key actors become a pretext for presenting and discussing energy issues. Hot topics in our period of analysis were the construction of a nuclear power station in Poland and the search for shale gas. Wind energy was discussed less frequently, and more in the local than the national media. This goes hand in hand with political priority being assigned to individual investments. Wind energy is the form least likely to be presented as of strategic importance for the state.

Second, popularity can refer to the way in which energy issues are presented to readers. Popular contents are presented in simplified form without the need for specialist knowledge or careful following of the subject, and are often embellished with sensation – like the corruption scandals over investments or tempestuous protests. They are usually addressed to the so-called “general reader,” without specific profiling, whereas less popular contents are published with a specific target group in mind. We can thus observe that media addressing contents to people interested in economic issues (e.g. *Rzeczpospolita* or *Puls Biznesu*) are more likely to cover energy issues than media with a socio-cultural profile. It is also less common to present energy issues in terms associated with citizens’ everyday lives: work, functioning of households, quality of life, local affairs. Perhaps the form of energy that comes closest to this everyday dimension is wind, which is rooted in the realities of communes and districts more than the others. Wind power is described in terms of neighbourhood, health and quality of life, but also of local tensions and conflicts, although even here these categories are simply present, rather than dominant.

The economisation of the discourse that is characteristic of presentation of energy issues is an element of power relations. It serves to achieve political interests, by strengthening or weakening the positions of those in power. This power is legitimised by specialist expert knowledge, which is to a great extent macroeconomic. It is interesting to note that the actors did not always treat the areas of ignorance and uncertainty that shone through in all the analysed topics as barriers to taking action. On the contrary, sometimes, as with the case of shale gas, knowledge gaps become a distinct impetus for action presented as the only way of securing practical knowledge. This kind of knowledge can then lead to economic calculations.

Topics of social consultations are very infrequent in the media discourses, while reflection on participatory ways of dealing with areas of uncertainty is essentially entirely absent. Not only do the media not consciously create discursive norms favouring deliberation, but they also fail to promote the very idea, to educate in the possibilities and tools for conducting it, only occasionally calling for broader consultations, rarely giving information about the processes of social dialogue – meetings taking place and the results thereof – and even more seldom of possibilities of participation.

Although the media discourses on energy issues are characterised by various degrees of inclusiveness and diversity of the positions expressed, studies conducted in other countries also point to a domination of the economic perspective. Despite the growing visibility of climate change and calls for a transition to a low-emissions economy, these discussions always take place within the current economic structures (Uusi-Rauva, Tienari 2008). They seem incapable either of initiating the radical changes that scientists deem necessary for solving the ecological crisis (Dryzek 1997; Prasad, Elm-

es 2005) or of effectively opening the communicative space to alternative perspectives and values.

In the Polish media, these structures model the discourse according to categories of profitability, economic risk, benefits and losses. They are represented by actors who are influential in a communicative sense and have high media visibility. The analyses show that other actors, such as those representing NGOs or informal citizens' groups, though present in the discourse, find it hard to occupy independent positions. Rather, they act as points of reference for the dominant actors. The asymmetry of these positions is plainly felt and legitimised by the (rather arbitrary) reference to the common good. Actors from within the system (representing the strong fields of politics and economics) often appear in the role of representatives of the state interest (equated with the general interest of citizens), whereas those from outside are depicted as representing the interests of minorities and individual groups, or even rival interests to the Polish state.

The economic perspective, expressed by the code profitable–unprofitable, is spliced with the political one, and it is this way of speaking and thinking about energy issues that is very much dominant in all the subject areas. Economic development, energy prices and costs of investments define the parameters of the discussion on Poland's energy future, at state level but also at the local level – voivodeships and districts. The very idea of development and civilisational progress is strongly equated with economic growth, as it is GDP growth that is expected to guarantee the prosperity and security of citizens. A slowdown in growth represents a threat for the future of Poles and places a question mark against their economic security. The alternative perception of progress referring to sustainable development, quality of life, and eco-development is marginal and confined to words. These ideas often appear as an element of image-based communication, but without being discussed more widely. They usually function either as slogans in the declarative statements of politicians and business leaders or as labels attached to movements contesting the dominant paradigm of thinking about the future of energy. In neither case are they accompanied by profound reflection, extended arguments or even an outline of space for debate. Interestingly, although the issues associated with aspects of climate change, CO₂ emissions and the EU's climate policy appear in all the topics, they do not constitute a fundamental point of reference for the main issue organising the discourses. Even with wind energy, with the strongest allusions to ecology, environmental protection and low-emissions technologies, dominant are local concerns associated with specific investment projects or the future of the districts. Research on the media discourse on wind energy in the USA, despite the increased significance and power of wind farms there after 2007, demonstrated a similar trend (Stephens et al. 2009).

The media discourse on energy in Poland is elite-driven and generally exclusive, accompanied by the belief that this is a difficult subject requiring specialist knowledge. In all three fields, the threshold of competences entitling actors to speak out was high, something underlined by those who do participate. Citizens are assigned positions of ignorance and lack of interest, which is also illustrated by the results of opinion polls. Mechanisms of exclusion are much more evident than those of inclusion. In all the subject areas, the same categories of actors are dominant (although the specific entities vary): politicians and business representatives, supported by experts, mostly from the field of economics. Institutional actors – states, ministries and government offices, and business organisations (banks, companies, consulting agencies) – play an important role in all three discourses. NGOs, political parties and research institutions appear in the background.

Whereas, as we have seen, certain groups of actors present in the discourse are clearly marginalised (NGOs, civic leaders and activists, local politicians, residents), many are entirely absent. If we compare the communicative activity in energy/environmental issues in Poland and Germany, for example, what is striking in the Polish media is the lack or very limited presence of consumer organisations, trade unions, schools and teachers, artists and social scientists (apart from economists).

Despite the differentiation of the discourses in many respects, as shown by the previous chapters, the media space is lacking radical discourses giving an alternative to the dominant paradigm. Even the internet space, which could become an area for developing and communicating different views and visions for energy, does not fulfil these expectations. The areas of internet communication that we analysed are not a deliberative space. Rather, they are characterised by similar trends to traditional media – press, radio, television – meaning above all dominance of the economic perspective, instrumental use of technological knowledge (scientific data supporting ideological goals), and a low level of dialogicality. What sets them apart is a higher level of dispersal of contents, their fragmentary nature and the fact that the contents which are often linked to other statements do not indicate which ones. They constitute a commentary, sometimes only loosely linked to substance. Of course, this does not mean that the internet does not provide possibilities of communication to groups or individuals contesting the dominant structures and perspectives. Yet those that it does offer are barely visible in the public space. Owing to capitalist mechanisms associated with marketing, market positioning, and access to costly communication technologies, professionalisation of network communication, strong, well-organised actors possessing economic capital, i.e. beneficiaries of the present system, gain much better conditions for organising the discursive space around themselves in a way that others can perceive. This is the first condition of having real influence on what happens in the communicative public space.

In their accounts of the individual subject areas explored in this book, the authors analysed in detail the resources used by actors to build and maintain their influential position, but also the mechanisms deciding on who is permitted a voice in the discourse and who is not. The next question is the claim to importance given to these discourses and assuring them a broader reach than one's own epistemic community. According to Giandomenico Majone, "the most important function both of public deliberation and of policy-making is defining the norms that determine when certain decisions are to be regarded as policy problems" (Majone 1989: 23–24). Furthermore, he argues that because uncertainty of the future is so ubiquitous in policy making, the values of those responsible for it are of great importance (Majone 1989: 26). When reality is characterised by a high level of variability and risk associated with making decisions, one of the mechanisms used to justify their course is reference to values. The criteria of suitability, pertinence and significance are therefore removed from the axionormative system. This explains the tendency of the actors in our analysed discourses to refer to values – development and progress, security, patriotism, freedom – although the semantic fields of these concepts prove to be varied (e.g. security). Use of this value (in various domains and contexts) constitutes the well-known strategy of securitisation of discourse, serving legitimisation of political actions and decisions (cf. Fischhendler et al. 2014).

Our analyses clearly pointed to certain blank spaces in the media discourses. The public sphere created in media communication is not representative of what goes on beyond its boundaries. Although it indicates the existence of controversies or conflict axes, it does not form a map of the diverse positions and views. The actors whose voices are heard occupy unequal positions, and the relations that exist between them can be described as relations of dominance and discrimination, if only because of the symbolic resources attributed to these positions (e.g. knowledge and ignorance, importance and unimportance etc.). Many arguments and standpoints articulated in the non-media space are not found in media sources, and some actors do not exist in it at all.

The authors of the analyses also point to the rational nature of the debates. This rationality is expressed, for example, in basing persuasive mechanisms on so-called hard numerical data, something that does not aid deliberation. Emotions, usually attributed to marginalised actors and confronted with the clinical reason of experts giving calculations, do not help with better mutual understanding, but rather with labelling behaviours and depreciating positions that contest the dominant economic-technocratic order. Rationality donning the mask of quantifiability is illusory. The data quoted, often based on estimates or documenting, for example, distributions of opinion, lacks any extended commentary to explain the specific details. It is also often pre-

sented fragmentarily. Statistical and other economic data is thrown around, and the actors presented the evidence constructed in this way as facts. Yet this evidence is always based on context, its meaning resulting from a concrete situation and needing to be framed appropriately (Majone 1989). An excellent example is data on the forecasts of shale gas resources in Poland. This data, presented as facts, varies hugely in the discourse. Measurable and objective figures can be used for subjective and ideological interpretations, and are also frequently a type of resource to which actors other than those citing them in a given situation (interview, programme) do not have access, which makes it difficult to discuss them.

The risks associated with planning future actions are also quantified. All the discourses we analysed are more prescriptive or proscriptive than descriptive – meaning that they more often refer to what will or should occur than to existing facts. In this way, the discourses construct visions of the future saddled with a high level of uncertainty (although the actors frequently colonialise this future, presenting it in a language of facts, rather than prognoses). One of the ways of reducing this uncertainty is transforming it into quantifiable risk, which is usually economic. In the other areas the future sometimes serves to put off troublesome problems, removing them from the agenda of current issues (e.g. solving the problem of radioactive waste or the environmental consequences of shale extraction technologies). In these cases, the mechanism of reduction of uncertainty is trust in the state, administrative services, science or the law. The actors who support a given investment assume that undertaking actions will in future bring solutions to controversial questions (we know what we do not know, and how to get the missing knowledge). Their opponents, meanwhile, point to the uncertainty additionally exacerbated by taking actions whose consequences are currently hard to predict (we do not know what we do not know). To refer to the concepts of futurisation and defuturisation in the sense coined by Niklas Luhmann (1976), we can state that in the analysed discourse on selected energy issues, the actors rather seek to narrow the options of the future to one desired scenario (defuturisation) than to “open the future” by permitting various scenarios to be constructed in order to discuss them further (futurisation). Despite the discrepancy in the preferences of the various groups of actors and their visions of the energy system, from the interpretation of the past (Poland’s own and that of other countries) is derived a priority of technological and economic development common to everybody. Although the politicians stress that the various energy sources are complementary rather than mutually exclusive, the actors in the discourse often treat them as rivals.

To sum up the media discourses on energy issues, I would state that they are dominated by a positive attitude towards the technologies they discuss and solutions to energy questions. If this attitude is not enthusiastic, it is

based on more or less directly expressed acceptance of the planned actions. Opposing positions and contesting discourses have considerably less media visibility. Furthermore, the dominant discourse in the media is limited in terms of analysis of social aspects taking into consideration the perspective of various groups of citizens. For example, the discourse contains scant mention of issues connected to inequalities – the participation of various groups of citizens in the risk and in the expected benefits, or the consequences of industrialisation of originally rural land. The economisation and tendency for the discourse to refer to state level means that problems remain abstract for the majority of consumers of the media, while the benefits are often expressed in the language of ideology. A pretext for covering energy issues is often given by political decisions or economic investments, and the statements of the main actors are then clearly used to persuade.

It is worth comparing this observation with the results of research on the attitude of European societies to various energy technologies (nuclear power or fracking), according to which Poles usually exhibit a higher level of acceptance than citizens of other countries (cf. Eurobarometer studies). The media discourses, which give precedence to business-political projects, take place at the macro level, and present energy issues as abstract problems for the average citizen, but in a persuasive and often ideological way, are of no small significance here.

The question we asked in this book about the character of the media space in the context of deliberation and the rules applying there demands an answer. The analyses that we have presented paint a picture far removed from a dialogical space searching for a broad and mature agreement. It might therefore seem that the mechanisms of exclusion and domination shown so clearly will lead to the perception of this space as an arena in which the individual interests and differing perspectives of actors clash. Yet the battle taking place here is seldom one in which the arms are the arguments of representatives of various worlds. While the main skirmish goes on at the fringes, it is only the strongest who flex their muscles in the arena itself. So it is the key actors of the economic and political sectors who dominate the media space. Despite the divergent interests (e.g. climate policy and economic objectives) or the mutual unpredictability of partners (on the one hand the instability of political decisions as an element of economic risk, and on the other the fluctuations of the economic situation), they form a kind of coalition symbolically supported by the cited experts from the circles of science and economic consulting. This is all fortified by such values as energy independence, stability of supplies and citizens' security. From time to time, from the crowd congregated outside the arena, another actor is summoned, who is not always *au fait* with the rules of the game. But the crowd view this actor, without the position strengthened by the symbolic resources of recognised

knowledge and status, as weak and helpless, or alternatively agitated and aggressive, determinedly fighting for attention. In this sense, then, the media discourses are closer to the logic of Habermasian dramaturgical action than to communicative action.

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